

Springfield Takes A Breather

Nonsmoker's rights won out in Springfield, Missouri

by Jim McDonald

On April 7, The Springfield City Council made it official—by a vote of seven “for” and two “against,” Springfield would be the first town in Missouri to have a citywide ordinance preventing smoking in restaurants. Members of *breathe easy Springfield*, the local coalition who worked for passage, say the new law is not exactly what they wanted, but they are nonetheless proud and happy to see many years of hard work coming to fruition. Much further than that, they expect this ordinance to be a positive improvement to life in their community, and, ultimately, to be an effective vehicle for change.

Officially the law is introduced as, “An ordinance amending the Springfield City Code, Chapter 58, Health and Sanitation, Article I, In General, Section 58-1, pertaining to smoking in certain places by providing for smoke free restaurants with certain exceptions.”

It is these “exceptions,” also known as “exemptions,” that give proponents a little pause—but only a little.

“When I heard about

them (the exemptions), I was disappointed,” said Molly Holtmann, Southwest-Regional Resource Specialist. “But even with the exemptions, I predict that the end result will be a lot better than what people think.”

Mary Ellison agrees. She is a health educator with the Springfield/

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Greene County Health Department, and also a member of *breathe easy Springfield*. “This ordinance doesn’t exactly level the playing field,” Mary said, “but there are an awful lot of folks saying, ‘we’re going smoke free.’ It is going to make a very big difference.”

For restaurants, there are three basic exemptions to the ordinance.

1. A restaurant in which 50% or greater of annual gross receipts are derived from alcoholic

beverages sales or a restaurant which has at least \$200,000 in gross annual sales from alcohol.

2. A restaurant which serves alcoholic beverages that has a nonsmoking area and an enclosed area for smoking separate from the nonsmoking area provided the smoking area is shielded floor to ceiling from the food preparation and non-smoking dining area and served by an independent air handling system.

3. A restaurant with less than 50 seats may permit smoking if it posts at all entrances to the facility that it is a “smoking facility.”

There are other exemptions such as outdoor or sidewalk seating areas, private clubs, limousines and the like, but the three listed above are the ones most likely to affect the bulk of the nonsmoking general public. An exemption is not as easy to get as it may sound. According to Mary Ellison, the process begins with restaurant management filling out a request form stating one or more of the allowable exemptions. The health department then pays a visit to officially confirm that the establishment

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qualifies. As of this writing a mere 35 establishments have applied for exempted status. That indicates that almost 80 percent of Springfield’s approximately 450 restaurants are expecting to comply with the full letter of Springfield’s new public smoking ordinance.

Beth Donovan, media spokesperson for *breathe easy Springfield* and Community Education Coordinator for CoxHealth Hospital System, says the debate sparked by the ordinance was the turning point for many restaurant owners. “A lot of restaurant owners wanted to go smoke free,” Beth said, “but they just weren’t sure what the overall reaction would be.”

According to Beth, the overwhelming public support for the measure was all the restaurant owners needed to see.

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"Then the owners saw the proof," she said, "it gave them the green light. Now there are several restaurants I thought would find a way to remain as smoking establishments—breakfast coffee-house type places—that have already gone totally smoke free."

Delores Joyce, who is the MOTUP Project Coordinator for Southwest Missouri State University, has noticed the same phenomenon. "Since the ordinance passed," she said, "several places we thought would have applied for exemption, are instead going smoke free."

Like the others, Delores is a member of *breathe easy Springfield* and has long been active in tobacco prevention advocacy. And also like the others, her initial disappointment with the ordinance is now tempered with positive expectations. "Springfield is paving the way for other communities," she said. "This is certainly a significant step."

Monday, July 7, is when the Chapter 58 amendment to the city code, also known as Springfield's Clean Indoor Air amendment, goes into effect.

"And when August and September rolls around," said Molly Holtmann, "you're going to see about 85% of Springfield's restaurants totally smoke free—I bet ya." ###

Cleanin' Up in Joplin

The March/April issue of *MOTUP Update* featured a story about a Joplin, Missouri laundry owner who had decided to be the first laundry in town to go smoke free. The title was, *Southwest Missouri Laundry Cleans Up*, and it ran on page one. The owner of the laundry, Luanne Becker, was so pleased to have her laundry featured in a statewide newsletter that she sent a copy of it to a friend who is a reporter for Joplin's daily newspaper, *The Joplin Globe*.

Her friend, Mike Pound, thought the story might make a great local feature piece and pitched it to his editor. Obvi-

ously his editor agreed. He sent a photographer over to Becker's laundry to shoot pictures, then used the new smoke-free laundry as an introduction to the larger issue of smoking policies in both Newton and Jasper Counties.

The story featured a review of existing public and private smoking policies and featured quotes from the director of the Joplin Health Department concerning the area's rates of smoking-related diseases, quotes from area smoke-free businesses, and an overview of neighboring Springfield's new city-wide ordinance that

regulate smoking in public.

For Luann Becker all the extra exposure was another of "nothing but" positive developments from making her business smoke free. For tobacco use prevention advocates, stories such as these in the local press represent even more. They represent the kind of media advocacy that helps educate the populace, spurs debate, and helps create the interest that leads to a demand for even more information and, ultimately, actions by elected officials and others to assure clean indoor air. ###

Tobacco Control is OK in Oklahoma

Oklahoma is the latest in a string of states to pass statewide bans on indoor smoking. As more and more of the coastal states regulated smoking, it started to look almost trendy. But now that it has happened in Oklahoma this trend is beginning to look downright mainstream. An editorial published in the 6/2/2003 edition of the *Tulsa World* could be considered a reliable index of what a landmark piece of legislation this is. Like the rest of Oklahoma, this paper is not known for trendiness or flights of fancy.

The editorial credited Oklahoma lawmakers with showing "considerable courage" by passing this legislation despite, "intense opposition from business interests and

the tobacco lobby." Then they predict that the entire population of the state will be the better for it.

The *World's* editorial writers have done their homework. They write that the ban isn't perfect, but will go a long way toward addressing some of Oklahoma's health problems, such as having one of the highest tobacco-use rates in the nation as well as one of the nation's highest levels of tobacco-related illness. They also mention the hundreds of millions of dollars a year in increased medical costs and lives lost due to tobacco use.

According to the *World*, the legislation "imposes smoking bans in most places open to the public but gives

some businesses 30 months to comply." They say that certain establishments, such as bars and veterans halls are exempt.

As we have seen in Missouri, the *World* says that opposition based their arguments on the rights of business owners to operate their businesses however they choose to do so. They concede the basis of that argument but adroitly point out that restaurant owners must abide by requirements involving sanitation and refrigeration, and they make the point that protecting the public from carcinogens falls into the same category.

The *World* closes by offering a note of thanks to state leaders for taking this historic step. ###

A Show-Me Lesson in Earned Media

No one around the office was much excited recently when we received a new set of smoking statistics from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Missouri was one of many states with no significant change. Conventional wisdom said no change equated to no headlines. But this was one time where persistence turned conventional wisdom upside down.

No change just did not fit into any definition of what constitutes news, so we went back to the drawing board. We printed out the full report and scrutinized it. And, lo and behold, right there in the small print was a mention of Missouri.

It seems Missouri was one of seven states to have experienced “a non-linear increase in some-day smoking.”

It was Missouri, alright, but what did it mean? What was non-linear? Were Missourians beginning to start or stop? Was this good or bad?

Randy Williams, the staff statistician, clarified the terms and came up with an article from Reuters news service that quoted CDC sources and provided some angles that started to make sense.

The article quoted Terry Pachecek, associate director of science for the CDC's Office of Smoking and Health. He used the term “casual,”

and made the point that it was not a good thing. He said people appeared to be taking an intermediate step toward quitting smoking by cutting the number of cigarettes smoked. This, however, tended to only make them more efficient as they took longer and deeper puffs to compensate. Hence, they were mistaken to believe that their risk to disease was lessened. Pachecek even had new numbers from a 16-year study of almost 20,000 men and women that hammered all these points home.

One of the more dramatic points was that regular smokers could cut the number of cigarettes smoked each day by half and still have a risk of death from tobacco-related disease that equalled someone who daily smoked as many as 15 or more cigarettes.

Now this press release was writing itself. Now we had a local angle, we had an easy-to-understand phenomenon, we had engaging social math, we had an increased risk of death and disease, and we had a culprit.

In other words, we had the textbook definition of what is considered to be “news.”

The headline for our press release went from “No Change in Missouri's Smoking Rate,” to “Casual Smoking on the Rise in Missouri.”

And in addition to a good hook for the media,

we had answers for the questions that we expected. Mainly we expected to be asked why Missourians would be taking this intermediate step in quitting when Missouri hadn't satisfied any of the conditions that made people quit in other states. Namely, Missouri hadn't passed an increase in tobacco taxes, and Missouri didn't have a fully funded comprehensive prevention program.

Our answer to those logical questions was that just fighting for those things had stirred debate and created media attention to what was undeniably a very important issue, but that although people were hearing the messages they obviously weren't hearing enough of them—they still were putting themselves and those around them at great risk to disease and death.

We sent out the release on a Thursday and by Friday the press was lighting up the switchboard. We continued to get press attention almost two weeks afterward. We did three live television interviews—the kind where they come to you, at your convenience. We had at least five live radio interviews with syndicated shows having regional and statewide coverage. Our release was picked up by newspapers

across the state, using all our quotes and making all our arguments. Many of the newspapers interviewed local experts from the American Lung and Heart Associations, hospitals, and local health agencies to localize the pieces even further. This gave local advocates another valuable opportunity to promote their organizations and their initiatives.

What seemed like one of those perfunctory, ho-hum press releases was turned into a substantial, totally positive earned media opportunity. It was totally positive because we got statewide coverage in all mediums and we controlled the issue from the get-go. It was totally our message, totally our focus. You can get great coverage and message delivery with “earned media” without having to spend big bucks for “paid” media—you just have to look for the angles. ###

**Coming next
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Next !

Advocates around the state see progress in places like Maryville, Springfield, and St. Louis, and they're starting to say, 'Why Not Here?'